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Did You Know?



The Perfumed Garden: Extolling the Virtues of the Vulva
By Violet Blue

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Many cultures regard the vulva and vaginal "lips" (from the Indo-European root *leb*, "to hang loosely,") as representing a woman's beauty and power. Traditions around the world both ancient and modern celebrate the attractiveness and variety of vaginal shapes and folds.

In the 16th century, Sheik Umar ibn Muhammad al-Nafzawi wrote *The Perfumed Garden*, an Arabian erotic manual comparable to the Indian *Kama Sutra* that extolled vaginal lips of all shapes and colors. His book was discovered by a French army officer in the mid-19th century and championed by Guy de Maupassant. Sensuously translated by the renowned Victorian bisexual Sir Richard Burton, it was obviously written for men but placed a great deal of importance on the individual preferences of women. Through personal research, the Sheik catalogued 34 different types of vulvas. A sampling of definitions, in his own words, follow:

Crested One

It is the name of a vulva furnished with a red comb, like that of a cock, which reddens and rises at the moment of enjoyment.

Endless One

This vulva extends from the pubis to the anus. It lengthens when the woman is lying down or standing up, and contracts when she is sitting. It looks like a splendid cucumber lying between the thighs.

Humpbacked One

This vulva has the mount of Venus prominent and hard, standing up like the hump of a camel.

If you're skeptical that there really is such a wide variety of vulvas, see a sampling of the many shapes, sizes and colors in the beautiful color photo book *Femalia* edited by Joani Blank.

In several societies, the labia minora -- the small inner lips of the vulva -- are adorned and/or enlarged, and such endowment is considered symbolic of a woman's status and desire. Among the African Hottentots, a woman is judged attractive and strong if she has large inner lips extending far beyond the outer ones. The inner lips are purposely stretched so long that early ethnologists called them the "Hottentot Apron." Other African tribes, such as the Uru of central Africa, practiced similar artificial enlargement of the inner genital lips.

An adornment similar to the male *ampallang*, a type of genital decoration that originated in Borneo, is used among the Turkhana women of Kenya. They enlarge their inner lips only slightly, but make a number of piercings through which they hang metal rings and ornaments; the dangling ornaments jingle as the women proudly walk through the village. Does this practice sound familiar? You don't have to be in an African tribe to decorate your genitals -- some contemporary women beautify themselves with tattoos and multiple piercings, enhancing their natural beauty in a similar fashion.

Information from *The Encyclopedia of Sacred Sexuality* by Rufus C. Camphausen and *Sexy Origins and Intimate Things* by Charles Panati.

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Violet Blue is Book and Video Review Writer and Manager of Special Publications for Good Vibrations, as well as editor of [Necromantic.com](#).

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